



2014

# Insert Title

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Insert Title

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth  
University.

by

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Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Visual Arts, University of  
Washington, 2012

Jack Wax, Glass Area Director, Craft/Material Studies

Virginia Commonwealth University  
Richmond, Virginia  
May, 2014

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## Abstract

INSERT TITLE

By Richard Abram Deslauriers, MFA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2014.

Jack Wax, Glass Area Director, Craft/Material Studies

It is a gestural sensibility forever suspended in the material as it cools. With each movement to and fro, I become fully immersed and given over to the activity of glassworking, where the simplest impressions whisper of fantastic melodies. I remain open to it: conducting a collision| a symphony of riffs, vamps and arpeggios. Constructing the chorus in disjunctive phases as if it forms out of its own directive.

The polyphonic rhythm of decisions converge into a new  
composition, now completely obscured from the intro-existing in  
reference only to itself and you

## Lost Time

Keeping myself guessing works best.

Historically, I approached making by design. The process included building a scale prototype for measurements and proactive troubleshooting prior to making a single cut. The step-by-step method led to a fabricated object where my hand focused on a schema: a well pre-planned act. With expression planned, supported by research and a sketchbook, I clocked labor hours until project completion. I equated a large quantity of time as representative of a successful studio practice. Hour after hour, working toward an intended end: a persistent approach to successfully crafting the design. Each object formally tight and conceptual heavy in matters of the further reaches of the human psyche. Alternate states and the parallel existence of our highly probable self found physical form in each object. I built all of them solely to point at these other concerns. After a couple years of work and research, I realized that the inaccessible system existing as part of my mind, intentionally out of conscious reach, showed latent effects in my practice. Experimenting with video to explore the collective

identity, in Spring 2012, I attempted to gain a glimpse of the Jungian archetypes through a melding of thousands and thousands of faces. Sampling the collective identity resulted in the archetypes emerging as monstrous shadows that exert influence on my very freedom. Can I escape them?

then one day when out of the ordinary  
too far into the adjacent territory  
swooped down  
plucking a tail feather  
aiming to drive off  
the crow narrowly missed a snap to the neck  
outstretched wings force a back step  
an hour later without change  
tension at an all time high  
strays killed in the process  
just this afternoon  
the eagle snatched the youngling  
up 500ft it dropped  
down, down, down it went  
the nest egg recessed to rock bottom  
a scramble of black flooded the air  
none successful in rescuing the affected  
still too few to stand up against the prey  
there is no escape

On the cross country drive from Seattle, WA to Richmond, VA in August 2012, I decided to abandon my previous making sensibilities. Much like the collective unconscious, an archetype of making had developed and retained influence on my academic born studio practice, I could no longer willingly allow it to persist. Instead, I opted to search for a new manner of making, with glass as the main focus. This task proved a

difficult notion to enact, it required a complete redefinition of all things I considered important: mixed media, fabricating, psychology, video, the human head, and color.

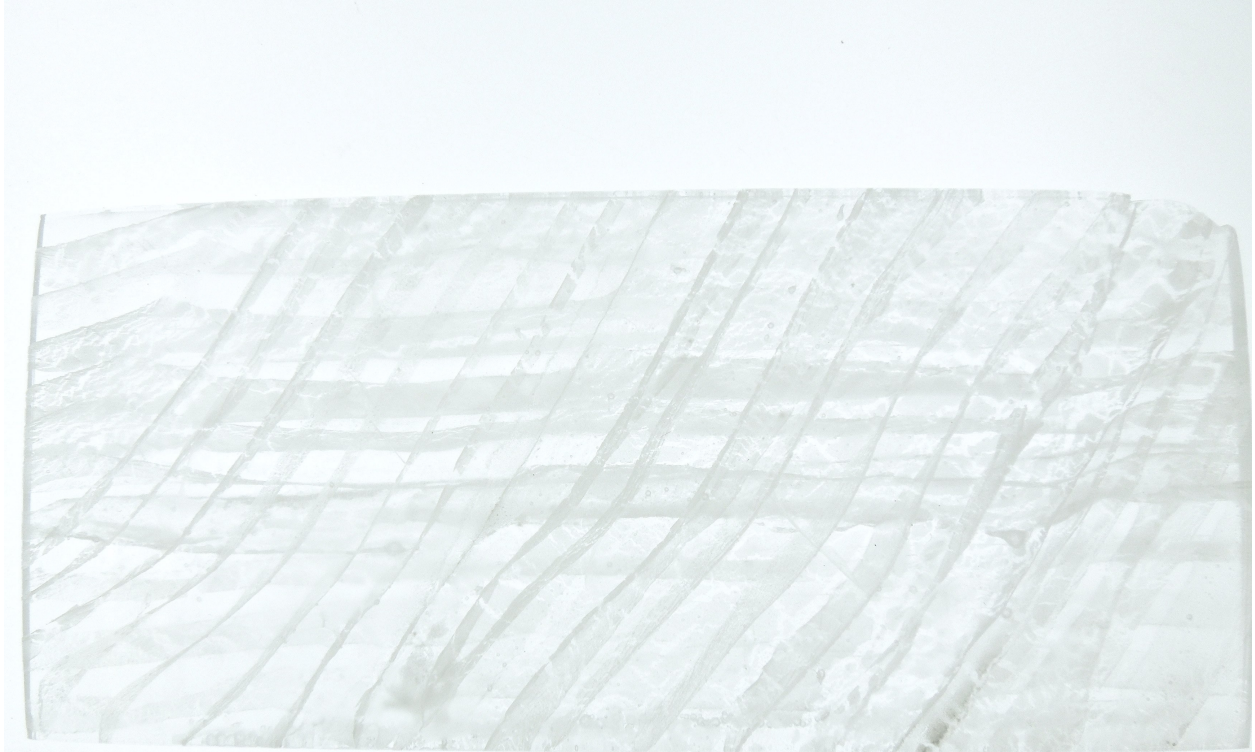


Image 1: Slab of Devitrification

At first, I did not know where to start except to suspend my opinion and stare blankly at inquisitive faces. Choosing to do something rather than nothing in the studio, I dissected parts of recycled bottles and fused various compositions. I purchased a case of Schott BK7 ripple pressings and fired the glass too long to build up devitrification, played with stoplight lenses and cold worked glass aggregate. These explorations satisfied my need to work long hours, yet it

remained mechanical, lacking direction toward an art object.

After several weeks of work, I still relied on drawings at scale to fabricate the work. Established tendencies persisted, and I found myself, once again, crafting a design—*Glimmer*.



Image 2: Glimmer



I continue to elaborate here on weeks of false starts and sudden endings [intentionally omitted]. Previous vital habits that lead to an intended result intensified as I worked without a product. A tension between intention to alter my practice and a desire for finished work increased. The sudden ending of fabricating work created anxiety. I couldn't just clock back in, no pre-planned designs waited for me while the academic time tick-tick-tick kept pace like a high-pitched click of a metronome.

One day, as I turned the pipe on the rail of the bench in the hot shop, clarity shined on how many gestures do not require laboring for weeks, its value is not set by quantity of time. An expression can be quick and eloquent. There is no minimum or maximum amount of labor that justifies the outcome. Eliminating processes, material and content was not enough to fully alter my studio practice. I had to let go of my ideal of success, my comfort in labor. With a fresh momentum and glass in my hand, I started cutting, fusing, turning, pulling, slumping looking for something, anything to present itself. Starting several projects at once, various techniques for building crossed and my labor invested in each object blurred, where I could no longer keep track of the time spent to produce them.

When one day, in the simplest way, I lost time.

it is not countless just uncounted there is no longer a  
need to assign specific value to generic passage at first  
there are many things that h o l d c a p t i v e by hands  
revolving gazed at somehow a minute matter beguiles  
attention somehow desertion constantly tethered to the  
inconsistent synchronicity i m stuck here maybe i ve been  
i ve been wait that can t w a i t there is a good way to  
convey progression mechanical processing active stasis a  
productless productivity clock speed f a s t e r a n d  
f a s t e r a lot can happen without actually making  
anything happen it is brutish rudimentary training  
because if i could explain it to someone i would not need  
to figure all this out no one n o o n e can do this part  
except for m e it is absolutely ordinary day a f t e r day  
of it going somewhere

wait

the process continues indefinitely

[insert title]

I opened the kiln and laid a sheet of Papyros on the shelf. I stood there, basking in the stark white glare off the 18" x 18" sheet. Like a fresh page in a new sketchbook, I intervened with a mark. Coiling up a sheet of paper like a small funnel, I poured blue frit hastily across the surface. Firing the kiln quickly to 1500°F, the fine frit pulled into itself, appearing



Image 3: Fused black glass on a kiln shelf



to look like fresh ink—even more convincingly ink when I used black glass.

After a few days, I am immersed and given over to the activity in a spontaneous way. Using a glass scoop, my arm swings, the motion is present, uncounted decisive acts happen without questioning them. Without sketchbook scribbles and research, each object is unique to itself. In no case will it be capable of pointing to a plan, it consists in having no nature, no memory other than how it presents itself. At first I am startled by the simplicity of it.



Image 4: Row of glyphs

After generating several pieces, I hung them in a traditional linear mnemonic in an attempt to bring logic to it. It read as something: a series of glyphs, symbols of near meaning or almost a cave drawing that lacked obvious representation.

Considering the individual parts to teeter on the boundary of language and meaninglessness, I continued to use the left-to-right convention to develop an installation that relayed a message. Although the install attempts had an intention, a visual indeterminacy occurred for the viewers. Apparent detail and vivid images resisted a full recognition. Using semantic structures to rationalize these abstract components caused a disassociation from the whole.

As I continued crafting components, I gained a sense for an organic process of developing a language through bodily occasions that are inseparable from psychological motives. Each installation revealed how intrinsically abstract the piece truly was, and its potential for endless combinations. Associations started to increase in complexity. Slowly seeing variations of the work revealed to me the nature of potential—each glyph

retained its meaning apart from the whole, even when it shattered. So open to it, I feel I merely stumbled upon the imperceptible twist-shifts in visual perception.



Image 5: [insert title] wraps a corner

Despite my initial thought, *[insert title]* is not about language, near meaning or glyphs, it presents the viewer with a potential image, a multiplicity of possible images that never fully resolve. No part is allowed to remain fixed to its source in favor of a richness for potential. I follow a line and stop it, I shift to empty space and start feudal territories. There is not a single impulse that brings a composition to completion.



I play at expressive behavior, a chaotic medley of tendencies that are fully present. It is a result of my perceptual self focused on processing a unity. A dynamic unity of patterns that range in moods and rhythms that at times surprise myself when I step back and become absorbed in the field of lines.

There is no final composition. The expressive set of components are continually developed, expanding the possibilities for future arrangements. Projecting the dynamics of conscious experience into glass, allowing it to be free of design, fabrication, future intent and time, I finally found a new vision, a way to encounter myself involved in the process of expressing my personality.



Image 6: [insert title]

Mute ON/OFF

You can see that I am saying something. The other two nearby laugh. We all know we never heard; it is so loud sometimes that you cannot do much of anything except be washed over by noise. Only a wall of sound can back it off, no one in the crowd prepared for it. Suddenly it is back in sync; a quick off step left to skip your heart beat.

Lights blare, there are too many faces, never enough time to take it in. Dripping sweat, the zap of the 58, I am ALIVE, keeping time, I rock the Gibson back on one. 3/4 s y n c o p a t e d swing with 6/8. I cannot decide if it's merely an issue of problem solving or a conceptual device to widen appeal. I laugh to myself at how simple a decision can be, instantaneous if only for one day and I crack a smile.

Ten years after my last stage performance, rhythm still finds its way throughout my body. An impulse so much a part of me that I do not realize that I bob my head, hum or sway to the orchestra playing in thin air. It drowns out the drone of the



mundane and I am often conducting a symphony of riffs. As I worked on *[insert title]* I found something lying dormant within me. As the old mannerism of making disappeared, musicality emerged. I wanted to be expressive and improvisational with glass, just as the materiality of music's ability to do the same. A scherzo's playful mood can be underscored by a tempting dissonant minor that I whistle along with the driving melody. It starts slowly then grows out of control until the movement completes in a tragic ending of contained potential. Countless connections made so fast, I am immersed in the polyphony rhythm of decisions. I let it guide my hand, something internal, extending, and immediate emerges as my focus shifts to the material and my response to it. Allowing my past musical focus to effect my new approach to glass.

In rhythm with it, an expression of the chaos of intersecting selves started to converge. With each object, my brain stored up traces from actually being carried away by the task of glassworking. Practice in handling it, how it breaks down or shatters. Hearing the tools glide over its surface or cut through it, and the light whip sound of the pipe twirling a bubble around in front of me. I am at the task of putting on a successful performance. Every day becoming comfortable enough

to spontaneously compose. It is a show of intellectual and emotional involvement, a deep passion for it to develop its own nature of consciousness.



Image 7: Pizzicato

In music, the appearance of movement is a powerful illusion,  
only the most strenuous personal effort can make it possible.  
Yet, no one should ever know how hard it is, it is not the work  
that matters, just the echoing of the movement suspended in the  
air as the vibrations dampen.

With my hands raised, the orchestra primed with breath, I lower  
the large kiln door with a BOOM.

## Consilience

Assist fray, spears and sprites  
bloom belletristic  
eager indulgence  
an entrance like a fortified structure  
raging plume repairs  
fault to the unskillfulness of the operator

the objects are not delicate    not fragile  
it is the glass    it    lies  
vivid and appealing

caught    you  
admiring the non-life of reflection  
a glint of yourself  
glare

It is all play!  
as the sounds of day  
I stare at the twilight of doubtfulness  
into the evening of long uncontended hours  
constant cheers from the shore  
waves push west  
lost to the undertow  
laid in lead

I perform wild mercenary  
feign the brink of break  
there is no certainty  
misled by a daylight dream  
suddenly somebody else  
a screen of mercurial chromatophores

we know something of    others  
we play

A strange exoskeleton-bird-cicada-nothingness flameworked  
structure perched on a metal studio stool in the corner of the  
room. The glass network developed by trying a different method

of building larger structures faster. Flameworking *Glimmer* required a great deal of time. I no longer needed prolonged hours of engagement with rudimentary processes to feel successful in my studio practice. Instead of obsessing over specific curves, I set up a collision course of bricks and kin furniture to slump the borosilicate rods. I generated a wide variety of high quality curves to use in several hours.

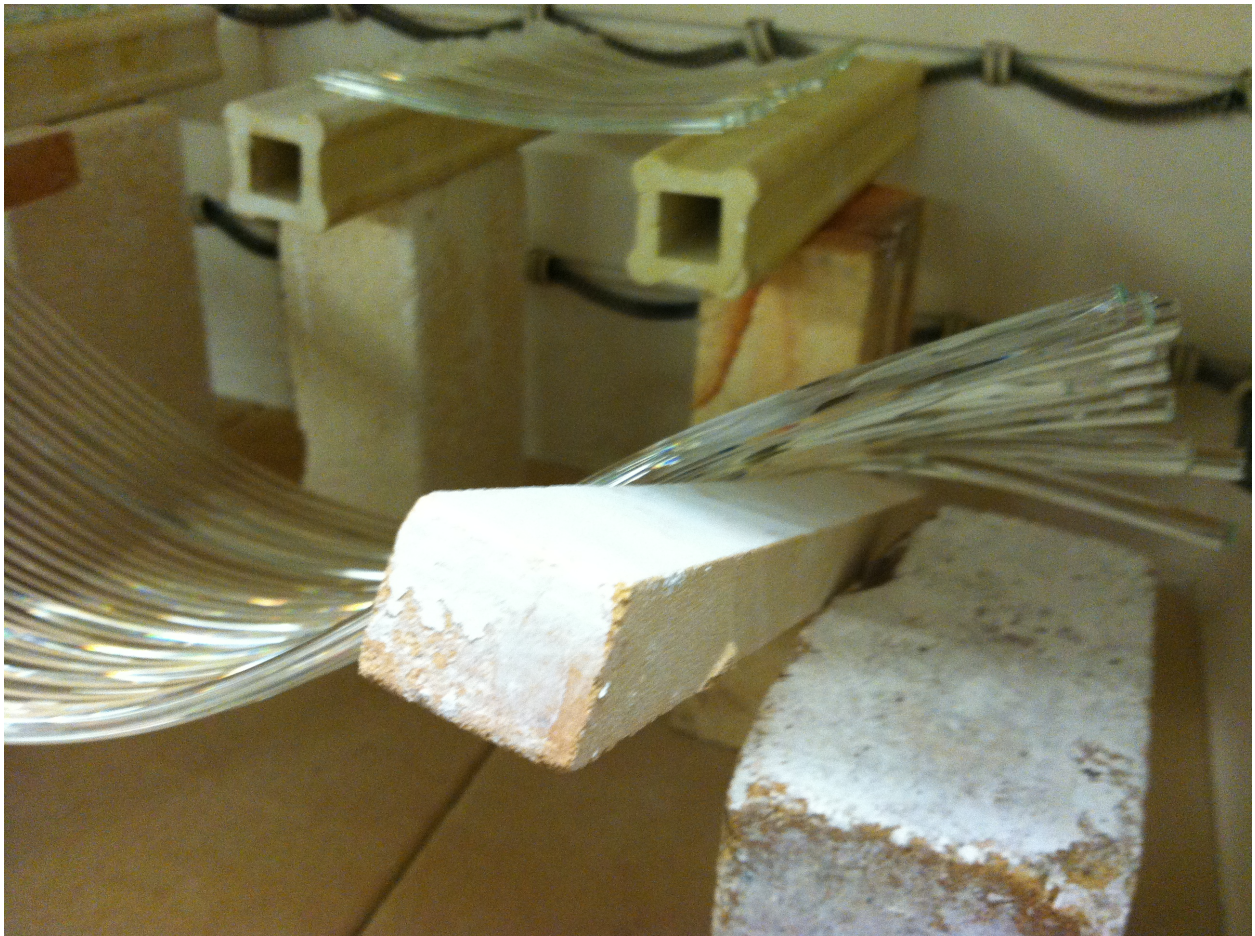


Image 8: Slumped borosilicate

Taking these slumped curves, I cut and rotated pieces. Welded random parts into larger and larger parts to construct a

singular form. It didn't matter what it would become, I only knew it would be hard to see and bilaterally balanced. Building a basic torso-like cage, I flameworked parts onto it, mirroring each addition until a 4ft structure emerged.

Colorless lines suggested the form. Its presence included absence. After a discussion about whether it sat or perched on the stool, Jared Cru Smith offered a solution. He built a perch stool. When the two objects met, they oddly worked together. Completely separate ideas and intentions met at a specific time. Not to integrate materials, but to intersect individual decisions.

The tallest structure reached six feet, with a sawhorse-ballet-bar-like wood counterpart. Building the tippy-toed form without the slightest concept for its final state started to free up the choices to be a collective movement. An improvisational section that flows from yesterday's composition. It is less figurative and more rhythmic, a visual sound of decisions. Line work converges into other lines to suggest unity in a frequently disjunctive process.





Image 9: Consilience [w/ Jared Cru Smith]

Unfortunately, at the scale I frameworked these objects, the joints could only be flame annealed leaving the object too fragile with unrelieved stress. The rigid structures when moved repeatedly gained stress cracks. Working into a larger scale or volume required a different approach.

The well played collaboration ended as suddenly as it started.  
Game Over...for now.

## re|cathect

Much like *[insert title]*, the process of developing work for *re/cathect* developed day after day. It is a presentation of my confounded self fueled by a drive to work that is still unsatisfied. After pulling cane for months, the routine act simply changed direction at the incomprehensible meeting of two causalities:

1. I wanted to use color
2. I wanted to work larger and faster with the rod structure of the flameworked forms.

Having worked on a couple different color combinations for *Pizzicato*, I narrowed down my color choices quickly and I started to pull, in a variety of thicknesses, hundreds of feet of cane in wine red, uranium green and special black. The color choices hold no particular meaning other than establishing a hue mood. In the end, I edited the black cane out of the installation of the three cane structures: *Scherzo No. 2*, *No. 1* and *No. 3*. Using the black magic sculpt to craft hundreds of unique joints replaced the black cane as the connectors transcended their functional purpose.



Subtle tapers, extremely thick or very thin, the variety of line quality from pulling my own cane, immediately increased the ability to build a biomorphic form of gestural energy. With a combination of torch work and kiln slumping, I quickly developed a supply of chaotic curves.



Image 10: Slumped cane

As I pulled more cane, other parts for *[insert title]* and plates fused in the kilns. The small glyphs tripled in size to 2ft x 4ft compositions. After a year of crafting components, the

depth of possibilities started to effect installation associations. Lacking storage space, I started to hang piles of the components on the wall. After several weeks, one wall suspended four different stacks. The storage solution started to look like a potential method for relating the components.

Every two firings of the large pieces, I used a 35in x 20in clear plate to capture the ghost image of the components. Fracturing the plates and refusing them into abstract shapes, the installation of the work had no final composition. Each part rotated and shifted in location after another form finished. After each install, the forms started to resemble block letter graffiti.

The graffiti-like plates are attention catching as the light hits the glossy surface. Light blindly glares while trying to follow the spatter trail that disappears off the edge of the plate. Reflecting surfaces readily capture a viewer's gaze, suspending their action for a moment in optical hypnosis. Viewers are caught admiring reflection, the light show of glittery glass from the shelf texture and the projection of refracted light through the plate surface onto the wall behind



it. An abstract video, *Neighborhood Watch*, accompanies the plates to act as functional lighting.



Image 11: Scherzo No. 2, No. 1 and No. 3



Image 12: Scherzo No. 1 [Detail]

Each day, I reinvested my affect and desires into the three developing installations. As motivations blurred between the three, I do not yet have the distance to speak definitively regarding the separate works. Even though technique varied, I reacted and responded to the objects with a similar temporal rhythm. I can only refer to these objects as visual sound forms, as a movement layered by movement, a chorus of decisions that bring line into space. As a measure in music, the melodic



line dances about with supporting harmony. The cane circles and circles in the form and suddenly ends, at times shifting in direction or in color.



Image 13: Mass of Black



Image 14: Mass of Black [Detail]

The mass pile up of black line compositions is like the reverberation of clamoring cymbals. A chaotic scattering of three quick gestures repeated over and over again until a dense mass of black shimmering noise hovers off the wall 10in. Sucking in the space around it just as it escapes into it.

Free to cope with contingencies as they arise, the final installation omitted the plate installation, *Gritty Glare*. After eight months of developing the work, the space could not accommodate it without crowding the installation. It is left out of the performance for now, destined for a set list at another venue. Surprisingly, this adjustment felt necessary and natural. The performance must always shift in response to the allotted set time and crowd. Performing what is strongest takes precedence over money or time spent preparing. As I continued to awaken to the parallels between my former performing arts self and current visual arts persona, a feeling of ease in tension occurred.

Attempting to avoid my pre-graduate making sensibilities brought out my musicality and integrated those survival mechanism into my studio practice. Having gained a better understanding of myself and the technical abilities I continue to develop, I no longer need a pre-planned act. I no longer fabricate objects. I compose with glass, melodic line after chaotic line.